ISSUE #22 AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2014

New TYCI contributor Daire McGuinness writes about the ever-present problem of gender stereotypes ... But this time in Lego.

It's been a while since I was in tune with the world of Lego. I enjoyed the clicking, obviously, central to the satisfaction of Lego. And the building! Oh, the endless capacity for building. Not just the fantasy, but the practical elements too. The Great Wall of Separation between My Side and Her Side was the stuff of legends. Unfortunately my patience was not designed for little bricks. Mops and chairs proved to make greater defences, and anything I needed to imagine could be scrawled so much quicker than searching for that last flipping slightly longer brick - where is it? - ah yes, already a crucial part of construction somewhere else.

I am a scientist now, by day anyway, and that fact, as well as my advancing years, have caused me to only recently get back in touch with Lego. It so happened that a well-meaning friend alerted me to a well-meaning Guardian article, which in turn alerted the good people of the world that hurrah! - equality has finally been achieved, there are soon to be female Lego scientists.

The story raised some mixed emotions as you can imagine. Ostensibly, the whole project is positive. The brain behind this launch

is Dr. Ellen Kooijman of Stockholm, who noticed the glaring divide between available male and female Lego figures. She submitted her proposal to Lego Ideas, in which Lego takes public suggestions for their next series of mini figures and reviews those which gain over 10,000 votes. One of these ideas is then selected to become the latest product.

Of course, we can't argue with the fact that Dr. Kooijman wants equality for female scientists in the Lego kingdom, or that at least 10,000 members of the public agree with her. There are many more facets of this story to be argued with. Firstly, what's with the omission? There are already Lego scientists. This means that Lego went out of its way not to create a scientist with a Lego vagina (or, eyelashes and long hair, as are the characteristics of vagina ownership in Lego-land). Why is that? Is the concept of a female scientist so bizarre, in the 21st century, that Lego thought the public couldn't handle it? Is it because the scientific play scenes in Lego-land include Tokikita's Toxic Meltdown and Arctic Base Camp, scenarios which it is frankly insane for a woman to be in?

Perhaps it's a social issue - a question of the poor lady scientists just not fitting in to the Lego kingdom. In this latest Mini Series their only female companions are Pretzel Girl, Diner Waitress, Grandma, and Lady Robot. Strong female role models obviously, especially Lady Robot. She was initially built to be a toy, but it was clear that there was something she liked even more – PARTYING! Who wouldn't want to choose between being a toy and a 24/7 party machine? I shit you not. Let's not even start on the fact that apparently even robots need an assigned gender and acceptable roles to match.

The final distasteful whiff in Lego-land is that the idea to inject equality did not even come from Lego HQ. Lego Ideas is a fantastic marketing concept, giving the public the idea that they can choose and influence what gets cast in to plastic. In reality, it took an independent petition and min. 10,000 people's worth of market research before Lego even considered that they should balance the gender table a little bit. Not that they seem to be running with the idea, if Lady Robot is anything to go by.

Lego – enforcing gender stereotypes to children in to 2014 and beyond. I wonder how long until lady scientist decides to start a family and give up the silly lab game. Or Lady Robot gets a tramp stamp.

SWEET SIXTEEN SATURDAYS

LETTERS TO YOUR 16 YEAR OLD SELF

Sophie Kromholz writes the first in a series of letters from the ladies behind TYCI.

Dear Sweet Sixteen,

The security that you look for in building a life with resolve will never come (at least not yet) – it's not your way. Instead you will make choices that call out to you, following your heart and interests. Yours is a life of doing and pursing. It's too early for you to set your roots down for anything or anyone.

I hate to tell you this, but you will continue to struggle with your weight. It's a constant theme. However, over time you will come to understand that your body and your life are not a democracy. Not everybody gets a say, and it is not up to you to shape yourself to meet their expectations. Still, drowning out the noise is hard, and confronting your own needs and wants is harder still. If you can, try to be less angry and more forgiving. Time will mellow you out, and you'll increasingly see people as their three-dimensional flawed selves, you yourself included. Don't be so hard on everyone, instead work on being kind. We're all struggling.

You will find your people across countries, but especially a

remarkable handful in Glasgow – which you will discover is the city of your heart. These people, your tribe, will not be like you, but made of a similar ilk and mindset still– taking equal delight in the absurdity of life. They will be ferociously funny, witty and creative, and they will drive you to be your best shiny self at times. They will also show you that being vulnerable is not weakness. You are not as tough as you think. Which is not to say that you are weak. It took me years to see it, but when I look at photos of you as you are now, sweet sixteen, there is something fragile about you. This fragility is part of you and what makes you so careful with others. You try to push it away, but it is not a bad thing to be breakable – it is a very human thing. Those that love you the most will also love you when you are in a gross weepy snotty heap of despair and they will pull you out of it and take you dancing. That's another thing: you are a dancer. Your people are also all dancers. Be wary of those who stifle your need to move.

Boys, and later men, will come and go like seasons. They won't be right for you, but you will fall hard and deep as you always do. You will come to learn later that there is a pattern, where you fall for broken men and try to swoop in like a knight in shining armour. You cannot fix people or save them. You'll learn to recognize the signs earlier on and step away quicker as you get older.

You worry about finding the right person, but who is to say what makes someone the right person? You'll move away from what your type is. Instead, in a most unexpected manner, you'll find a man from the Scottish islands. He is different from what you thought you wanted, but there is a brazenness and resourcefulness that is tantalizing and awe inspiring, mixed with a sweetness that makes you feel safe. He reads Kafka and sci-fi, and makes you weak in the knees when he speaks. He'll move to Spain, having captured your imaginations and taken your heart along with him. You're smitten. It's too soon to say what will happen, but you're very glad he exists.

More than anything what will remain true is that you are not a creature of regret. You will always follow your heart and feel deeply, and when it breaks you, you will accept the consequences and bear the scars and eventually, gradually, you'll move on (albeit with a pirate limp when it's been particularly rough).

I can't tell you where it is life is taking you yet, but it's been interesting and bound to continue so. Somewhere something incredible is waiting to be known.

- you're off to explore
- off to disturb the universe

Love & understanding,

S.

The Beaches

Sophie Kromholz discovered The Beaches when she saw them support Brody Dalle in Glasgow earlier this year. Here, she catches up with the Toronto band to find out more about what they do.

Who are The Beaches and what's your background story as a band?

Jordan Miller: The Beaches are a group of friends and sisters who made a band together. First we were in a band called Done With Dolls and when we were tired of making that type of music we decided to change it up and that's how The Beaches came to be.

Who are your musical influences?

Jordan: David Bowie and Tears for Fears.

Kylie Miller: Jack White and The Kills.

Leandra Earl: The Beatles, Metric and St Vincent.

Eliza McDaniel: Jack White and Bombay Bicycle Club.

Tell us about your writing process.

Leandra: We usually bring some ideas to band practice and then just jam on them and figure out set parts for our individual instruments. Jordan takes care of the lyrics and melody, recently finding inspiration in different moods and religions.

In the music video for Absolutely Nothing, you seem to consciously be curating a point about male and female roles, as you are dressed in suits, surrounded by men in their underwear. Could you talk us through the message you were making with this video?

Jordan: I think the point of the video was to show that roles between the genders are interchangeable. It's fun seeing men in suits and women in their underwear, just as it's fun to see men in underwear and women in suits. When gender roles are assigned, that's when problems arise.

Best piece of advice you have been given, about music or just about life?

Eliza: It sounds so cliché, but the most important advice I have been given about music / life is don't sweat the small stuff. In life, this saying is pretty self explanatory. But with music, it's easy to over think when writing a song, or to easily get stressed out over nothing right before a show. Reminding myself to not sweat the small stuff helps me stay less stressed, and makes it easier for everyone in the long run.

THIS IS AN EXCERPT. TO READ THE FULL ARTICLE, VISIT TYCI.ORG.UK. FOR MORE ON THE BAND, HEAD TO THEBEACHESBAND.COM.

AN IMPORTANT AS(S)TERISK* ON BEAUTY*

An opinion piece on body image by new TYCI contributor Jennifer Hamilton.

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I will not apologise for my ass.
This body of mine, that each day becomes more womanly than young girl, will not be robbed of the beauty I feel. Not vanity – beauty. My body is beautiful in its un-perfect way and I will not give in and hide. I have grown up with magazines pushed in my face of fan blown hair and perfect pouts and paragraphs written on how to turn myself into a man pleasing machine.
I have grown up seeing the objectified woman being masked as female empowerment. I have seen us become obsessed with each wrinkle, dimple, and tiny etch of character.
But I will not back down; I will not look at myself in the mirror, naked after a shower, and mentally map the terrain as treacherous. The terrain that is my body is beautiful. So when I walk past you sitting there in your car and you feel the need to verbally harass me for enjoying the sunshine that fills my soul with hope, I will firmly tell you that you are wrong, and the same way I give you respect, I also expect that in return.
And you will sit there embarrassed and confused, your friend will not know where to look, and I know that suddenly I turned from an object into a person in your eyes. And you finally become aware that calling us "bitches" or "hoes" and proclaiming how you disrespected someone at her weakest state are lies of behavior you have been fed as you apologise.
I clothe my body for each

occasion knowing that I am also responsible for respecting the gift of being a woman. But I cannot control my proportions and I will not become ashamed. You see, this ass that men will stare at, and that when I was younger I felt the need to hide in layers and oversized shirts, was not given but earned.

Since the age of twelve I ran track in order to survive, growing up in a country where I didn't know the language and felt misplaced. Here, I learned that the language of hard work and the smooth glide of a curve on a 200 meter dash was universally understood.

And the thousands of thousands of stairs I have run, crunches I have done, hurdles, and drills, and painfully mornings, and sunburned ready to give up end of meet days were performed for years not to become an object, but to never be afraid. If you invest yourself into anything with passionate love, it will cause you pain and heartbreak, but it will also remove fear. Fear is removed standing next to a girl who you know will make you run so hard that at the finish line you will grasp for air and your legs will shake so badly you cannot stand, and yet continue to stand there and allow the challenge and imminent pain to push you like you have never been pushed. Because at the end of that finish line you are a conqueror, not of people but of yourself.

So maybe it was that decade of consistent practice that showed me how beautiful I was. That my body was designed for movement, my arms to grab the children I teach every day into a loving embrace they do not receive at home, my stomach the perfect place where he lays his head and proclaims his dreams into existence, my shoulders the shelves of straps to a backpack that carries me from country to country in search of self.

So no, I do not stare into that mirror to look at the cellulite on the back of my legs which I know exists, or that my stomach is not as slim as it could be. I stand there and I look at the years of stories and work and love and adventure and dreams and hope and a girl becoming a woman.

This ass is not a symbol of an object, it is a symbol of the strength I carry.

Our bodies are what we need, just the way they are. So each time you find a way to turn me into an erroneous illusion propelled by a culture hell bent on charging money to fulfill a mass produced fantasy, I will not back down. Because I am not afraid.

KIRSTY LOGAN

Lauren Mayberry speaks to the Scottish author ahead of her appearance at Edinburgh Book Festival later this month.

What are you working on at the moment?

I'm working on my third book, a collection of linked stories called A Portable Shelter. It's inspired by Scottish and Scandinavian folk tales, and explores loss, truth, childhood, and the stories we tell about ourselves. When it's finished there will be thirteen stories, including the 'frame' story, but at the moment I've only written three of them. I try to keep the stories straightforward, but already they're getting so weird and dark and labyrinthine. I can't help myself…

Describe a typical day in your professional life.

Every day is an unfocused mix of writing, reading, replying to emails, and daydreaming. It generally goes like this:

Up at 6.30am. Straight to the stovetop coffeepot. Write for an hour while drinking strong black coffee and staring into space. Feed the dog. Do back stretches. Check email. Take the dog out to the garden. Enjoy the sounds and sights of the city waking up, while the dog does a wee and runs around and around and around in mad circles. Back upstairs to write more words. Eat breakfast while reading a book. Reply to emails. Feel guilty that no matter how many emails I reply to, there are always more. Go for a midday run (more accurately, a very slow jog) around the park with my friend Susie. Have lunch while watching an episode of Borgen or Veronica Mars or Hannibal or The X-Files or Law & Order:

SVU. Have to physically put the TV in the cupboard afterwards to avoid spending the whole rest of the day watching it. Think about writing more, but get lost in the labyrinth of emails instead. Panic that it's almost 4pm and my girlfriend Annie will be home from work soon, and she will see me procrastinating on social media when I'm meant to be writing, so I will have to either do some work or stop for the night.

When Annie gets home, make her a cup of tea and have a chat. Take the dog for a walk. Sit at the breakfast bar and look at home decorating magazines on the iPad, asking Annie which pictures from the magazines she likes while she cooks dinner. Eat while watching RuPaul's Drag Race. Do the dishes.

I know everyone hates genre pigeon holes but how would you describe the style of your work?

Scottish magical realism.

What are the best and worst parts of your job?

The worst is admin - emails, accounts, tax, invoicing, blah blah blah. It's boring, but it needs to be done. The best is pretty damn glorious: I get to make a living by making things up. All the possible downsides pale into nothing compared to that!

How do you go about getting books picked up by publishers? Any tips?

The most important thing is to write the best book you possibly can. Self-promotion, networking, social media - it's all important, but in the end it all comes down to the quality of the book.

While you're working on that book, make good use of social media to build up connections. So many of my commissions, publications and event invitations have come about through people I've met on Twitter. The most important thing is to remember that it's social - don't ever be self-serving or self-absorbed, and give as much as you get. Helping others helps you.

And what would your general advice be to TYCI readers who want to do what you do?

Don't give up! The difference between published and unpublished writers is that the published ones didn't quit.

Tell us about some of your favourite authors. Who do you admire and why?

I'm a huge fan of modern fairytales with a feminist slant: Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood, Lucy Wood, Ali Smith, Francesca Lia Block, Cassandra Parkin. I also love anything that puts a new slant on crime and thriller fiction, because I enjoy crime novels but get so bored and frustrated with the whole Beautiful Dead Girl cliche. Cara Hoffman's So Much Pretty and Denise Mina's Garnethill were a revelation.

I also have a soft spot for children's horror stories, because they're so much creepier than adult horror. The adult stories often cram in as much gore and violence as possible, but stories for children have to be a lot sneaker with the horror. It's all about suggestion, suspense and shadows - which is a hell of a lot scarier. Marcus Sedgwick, Chris Priestley, Leon Garfield, Joan Aiken and Alan Garner have all given me nightmares.

THIS IS AN EXCERPT. TO READ THE FULL ARTICLE, VISIT TYCI.ORG.UK. FOR MORE ON KIRSTY'S WORK, HEAD TO KIRSTYLOGAN.COM.

TYCI LIVE

FREE ALL NIGHT IF YOU WRITE TYCI ON YOUR KNUCKLES

FOR OUR SEPTEMBER EVENT, WE'LL BE BACK IN **BLOC** FOR A **FRESHER'S WEEK SPECIAL** WITH LIVE MUSIC FROM WELSH OUTFIT **CUT RIBBONS** AND DJ SETS FROM **FUTURE FIGHT (GLASGOW ROLLER DERBY)** AND **KID CANAVERAL**

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11PM TILL 3AM
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FREE BEFORE MIDNIGHT; 2 POUNDS AFTER

PROCEEDS FROM THE SEPTEMBER RAFFLE WILL GO TO **ANXIETY UK.**

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The latest episode of the TYCI podcast is online now and can be found at soundcloud.com/tyciblog. Our next Subcity show will be Thursday 11 September, 5 – 7pm. Tune in at subcity.org/shows/tyci.

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TYCI is a collective run by women.

We have a website where we write about things which affect us and put together features on art, theatre, music, film, politics, current affairs and most things in between. We also talk about similar stuff on our monthly podcasts and radio show on Subcity.

This zine is a collection of some of the content from our site and is distributed in conjunction with our monthly live events.

If you would like to get involved, reply to any of our articles or just generally say hi, hit us up on contact.tyci@gmail.com or visit tyci.org.uk.

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